

# THE MOUNT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



Reading Borough Council

April 2009

# THE MOUNT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

CONTENTS	Page
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	4
1.1 Purpose of the appraisal	4
1.2 Summary of special interest	4
<b>2.0 The planning policy context</b>	8
2.1 Local planning policy	9
<b>3.0 Location and setting</b>	10
3.1 Location topography and setting	10
<b>4.0 Historic development</b>	11
4.1 History	11
4.2 The effect of historic development on plan form	12
<b>5.0 Spatial analysis</b>	12
5.1 Key views and vistas	12
5.2 The character of spaces within the area	13
<b>6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area</b>	14
6.1 Definition of character areas:	14
Area 1: The Mount and its Christchurch Road frontage	15
Area 2: Hillside, Lower Mount/Allcroft Road	15
Area 3: 53, 53A, Linden Mews, 55 Christchurch Road and the Progress Theatre	16
The Area generally	16
6.2 Activities and uses	17
6.3 Architectural and historic character; building methods and materials	18
6.4 Buildings of Townscape Merit	18
6.5 Public realm: Floorscape, street lighting and street furniture	19
6.6 Local details and features	20
6.7 Historic associations	20
6.8 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements	20
6.9 General condition of the area: The extent of loss, intrusions or damage i.e negative features	21
6.10 Problems, pressures and issues	21
<b>7.0 Areas for further work</b>	22
7.1 Consideration of conservation area boundary changes	22
7.2 Opportunities for enhancement	22
7.3 Monitoring and review	23

Appendix 1 - Townscape Appraisal Map	24
Appendix 2 - Relevant Local Plan Policies	27

# THE MOUNT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal seeks to record and analyse the various features which give The Mount Conservation Area its special architectural and historic interest. The area's buildings and spaces are noted and described, and marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map (Appendix 1) along with listed buildings, buildings of townscape merit, significant trees and spaces, and important views into and out of the conservation area. There is a presumption that all of these features should be "preserved or enhanced", as required by legislation.

This appraisal builds upon national policy, as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) - Planning and the Historic Environment*, and local policy, as set out in the *Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006* and the emerging *Reading Borough Local Development Framework*. It provides a firm basis on which applications for development within The Mount Conservation Area can be assessed. It also forms a basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals for the area.

This appraisal follows the suggested format contained in Appendix 2 of the English Heritage document "Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals" August 2005.

### 1.2 Summary of special interest

The Mount Conservation Area lies less than 2km south east of Reading town centre. It is centred on The Mount, which lies immediately to the north of the west-east aligned Christchurch Road, which is part of the busy main A327, leading to Shinfield Road and points south out of Reading. Immediately to the north is Allcroft Road, which runs parallel to Christchurch Road. Christchurch Road and Allcroft Road were once linked by The Mount (and the Lower Mount to the north of the Mount), but this through route was closed off as part of a conservation area enhancement scheme implemented shortly after the formal designation of The Mount Conservation Area on 24 April 1987.

The Mount actually comprises two parallel streets running south to north, linked by two shorter streets of the same name running west-east at the northern end and middle of the south-north "arms". It comprises a close knit street block of listed houses originally built for Huntley & Palmer's employees. These houses are of a particularly distinctive and unique character being constructed of gault bricks with paler brick banding and detailing, and retain much of their original character and appearance, including frontage walls and railings. Nearby properties fronting Christchurch Road are of a similar age, but of a different style, more typical of this area of Reading, and again retaining original walls and/or railings. Hillside, to the north of The Mount is a good example of a slightly later large Victorian detached

house, which also retains its original walls and railings. This was built as a family house for W I Palmer, but was subsequently leased to the Sutton family before becoming a Reading University hall of residence.



Hillside from the northeast

The boundaries of the area are indicated on the Appraisal Map appended to this report (Appendix 1). It was formally designated on 24 April 1987 following a period of public consultation, and was the first of a new tranche of conservation area designations following the designation of the town's first four (town centre) designations in 1972.

The majority of the buildings in The Mount itself comprise a unique and distinctive group of buildings of both architectural and local historic value. They form the core of the conservation area. They are listed Grade II. These buildings date from c.1876 and were built for Huntley and Palmer's clerks, foremen and managers. They comprise a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses with common design and decorative features. All the properties were constructed of gault bricks with paler detailing and banding, and with slate roofs. A brief summary follows:

- 6 and 24-36 even: 2 storey terrace of clerk's houses with foremen's houses at either end of the row. The end houses (6 and 24) have 2 storey bays capped with gables with moulded copings. The terraced houses have paired doorways with bracketed arch entrances and jointed gables. Windows have bracketed cills and cast iron flower guards. All the frontage railings remain except number 6, which has also been much altered at the rear.
- 8-22 even: Same format as previous, with 8 and 22 as the end houses. Visually, number 22 closes off the vista looking up Lower Mount from Allcroft Road.
- 23 and 25: A reflected pair of under-manager's houses. These have matching turret roofs and are particularly prominent when viewed from Allcroft Road at the

rear. The brickwork at number 25 was painted over at the time of their listing, which somewhat spoils the local ambience.

- 38 and 40: A matching pair of semi-detached houses. The most notable features are: the hipped slate roof, projecting ground floor bay windows, the hoped arched entrances and the round headed first floor windows. A short length of wall with moulded coping and garden entrance links to 57A Christchurch Road.
- 57 (& 57A) and 59: Substantial detached manager's houses facing Christchurch Road. The most notable features are the decorative turrets facing south west towards Christchurch. The original cast iron railings remain.
- Wall between 57 and 59 is separately listed. The gates are missing and the opening has been widened. It comprises gault brick with paler diaper patterns and cogged courses below a moulded capping. The end piers have moulded capping.

Hillside, Allcroft Road and the gatepiers, walls and railings on Allcroft Road and The Lower Mount are also listed grade II, and are fairly recent, if belated, additions to the list (LBS numbers 492538 and 493634 dated 31/03/2005).

Hillside dated 1880 by Morris and Smallwood for WI Palmer of Huntley and Palmers was extended and dated 1898 by the same architects. It is built of grey brick with extensive red brick and terra cotta dressings, slate roofs and red tile cresting. The listing describes it as "one of the most opulent buildings of this period in Reading, which has a rich diversity of late C19 housing. Morris and Smallwood were prolific and accomplished local architects, well tuned to the tastes and trends in public and private building, suited to a wealthy client wishing to invest in a building of the highest quality". The building is now owned by Reading University and subdivided into flats. Although the grounds have been built over in part, the house retains its entrance drive, gates and railings and some of its garden, giving it its original sense of scale space and context.

The gatepiers, walls, gates and railings form two sides of the boundary to Hillside to Allcroft Road and Lower Mount. These date from 1880-1900 and are valuable in putting the house in context.

The quality of the Hillside site is also enhanced by its extensive boundary tree cover.

Together, Hillside and The Mount represent an urban and industrial counterpart of the country landowner's estate village and "big house".

Other properties in the Conservation not mentioned thus far are:

- 53, 53A. Linden Mews and 55 Christchurch Road, and 2 and 4 The Mount, all of which are shown on the 1877 map of Reading and are therefore of the same date or earlier than the main properties in The Mount. These are included in the Conservation Area for their group value and character. Number 53 is a single storey classic lodge building which adjoined the main entrance to "Sutherlands", which site was redeveloped in the 1970s as Lancaster Close (accessed from Allcroft

Road). Part of the original pierced and decorative wall also remains. 53A and Linden Mews were formed from "Sutherlands" outbuildings, and although altered and extended, these retain their original spatial pattern. 55 is a prominent two storey white rendered building of classic proportions with some Georgian style windows in the main elevation. Again, original railings enclose the frontage.

- Progress Theatre, which dates from the 1930s has been used as a theatre since 1951. It was included in the originally designated conservation not for its own intrinsic value, but "to reasonably round off the area".
- 2 and 4 The Mount are rendered properties of similar age to their neighbours but of lesser quality.



2 The Mount

Together, all the properties mentioned above, which are also drawn together by the existing open spaces along the west side of The Mount (in front of Sutton Walk which lies to the west) form a unified conservation area. Trees have already been mentioned in relation to "Hillside", and throughout the conservation area trees are a significant and important part of its character and setting, whether they are in the grounds of individual properties, in the open space in front of Sutton Walk or just outside the area. Important tree cover is shown on the Townscape Appraisal Map at Appendix 1.

The majority of the area surrounding the designated conservation area comprises inter war and 1960s-70s housing, ranging from bungalows along the east side of The Mount to 1970s terraced housing in Sutton Walk and a range of large scale detached housing in Allcroft Road (including, more recently, Lancaster Close). The south side of Christchurch Road opposite the conservation area shows large houses here on the 1877 map, but, except for number 40 (much altered and extended) and The Queens Head public house (numbers 52 and 54) to the east, little remains from this period.

Recent redevelopment, particularly of the former garage premises west of the public house have made some attempt to echo the colour of brickwork and railings evident opposite them in The Mount, but none of this frontage is worthy of conservation area status. Certainly none of these areas was considered at the time of designating the conservation area to merit inclusion within it.

As a result of public consultation at the time of designating the conservation area, arguments were raised to exclude Progress Theatre from the conservation area, and to include Sutton Walk. These issues will be reconsidered at Section 7.1 below.

There is clearly therefore an architectural and historical unity to this part of Reading, not least in the use of gault and paler detailing bricks rather than the more usual "reds" that were prevalent in Reading at the time of building. This may reflect a conscious decision to differentiate between the rather grander houses built here for Huntley and Palmer's "managers", as opposed to those built for factory hands elsewhere. Similarly the use of grey bricks on Hillside may reflect an even grander house. The properties in The Mount also demonstrate a richness of detailing not often found in more artisan housing, for example chevron moulded 1<sup>st</sup> floor brick window arches; modillion eaves cornices; cogged capping to chimneys; bracket cills, cast iron flower guards and moulded lintels to windows; and the railings and standards at the front of the properties. "Hillside" contains even more elaborate detailing including much use of terra cotta. Whilst it is the character of the area rather than of individual buildings which should determine whether an area should be designated as a conservation area, these architectural details do form unifying features throughout this particular area.

The area therefore possesses an architectural, historical and visual quality and coherence which makes it worthy of conservation area designation. It comprises a close knit street block of listed houses with local historic interest being originally built for Huntley & Palmers employees. These are houses of a particularly distinctive and unique character being constructed of gault bricks with paler brick banding and detailing, and retain much of their original character and appearance, including frontage walls and railings. Nearby properties fronting Christchurch Road are of a similar age, if different style, more typical of this area of Reading, in this case having a rendered finish, but again retaining original walls and/or railings.

Only limited physical changes have taken place to undermine the intrinsic character of the conservation area.

## 2.0 The planning policy context

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A conservation area is defined as *"an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"*. It is the quality and interest of an *area*,



rather than that of individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying a conservation area.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas. Section 72 specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. This document should be read in conjunction with national planning policy guidance, particularly PPG 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment. The layout and content of this conservation area appraisal follows "Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals" published by English Heritage in February 2006.

## 2.1 Local planning policy

The Reading Borough Core Strategy was found to be "sound" in December 2007 and was adopted in January 2008. Policy CS33 provides a strategic level policy that indicates that the historic environment including their settings will be preserved and enhanced. This policy will, in part, replace the Reading Borough Local Plan policies, including some of the saved policies discussed below. Proposals will have to have regard to the provisions set out in PPG15.

The Local Plan policies which seek the preservation and enhancement of archaeological sites, historic parks and gardens, listed buildings and conservation areas are set out in Chapter 6 of the *Reading Borough Local Plan 1991-2006* which was adopted on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1998. The majority of policies were "saved" by Direction of the Secretary of State on 24 September 2007 (with effect from 27 September 2007). The saved policies of particular note are Policies CUD 6 (Demolition of Unlisted Buildings in Conservation Areas) and CUD7 (New Development in Conservation Areas), which outline Reading Borough Council's approach to development in Conservation Areas. Copies of these policies can be found at Appendix 2 of this document. With regard to listed buildings in the Conservation Area, Policies CUD 1 ((Works Affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 2 (Change of Use of Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings) and CUD 4 (Setting of Listed Buildings) also apply.

The Local Plan's conservation objectives are stated as:

- (i) to conserve or enhance the Borough's stock of listed buildings and other buildings of architectural quality or historical significance;
- (ii) to identify protect or enhance areas of character;
- (iii) to identify and conserve areas of archaeological significance and to protect or enhance finds and sites for the education and enjoyment of Reading residents.

### 3.0 Location and setting

#### 3.1 Location, topography and setting

The boundaries of The Mount Conservation Area are shown at Appendix 1. This conservation area lies almost equidistant between the Christchurch Conservation area to the west and the Redlands Conservation area to the east. The area lies less than 2km south east of Reading town centre on the north side of Christchurch Road, part of the main A327 road out of Reading. The parallel Allcroft Road lies to the north of the conservation area. Christchurch Road is now, and was historically, an important local distributor road linking Reading to points south and east of the town, but in the early part of the eighteenth century the area either side, including The Mount itself was largely rural. It is now also an important bus route in to and out of Reading town centre. The conservation area is accessible to local shops in Christchurch Road, Reading University sites and the Royal Berkshire Hospital site. It is a popular residential area for the latter two major employers in the town.

The conservation area slopes gently down from south to north but could not be described as having a prominent presence from anything other than close up viewpoints. Hillside dominates from such viewpoints in Allcroft Road, and although quite well screened by substantial boundary cover, contains the extra local presence of substantial original boundary walls and railings. The core buildings in The Mount itself are also prominent at close quarters by virtue of their unique use of gault bricks, paler facings, other detailing and their retained boundary walls and railings, which are less evident to their west and east.



24-36 The Mount

The spire of Christchurch itself to the west (in the Christchurch Conservation Area) is probably the only building in the immediate locality which is visible from longer distances.

The area surrounding the conservation area tends to be much more recently developed, with little pre-dating the 1930s. It is predominantly residential in character, but more mixed on the south side of Christchurch Road. At the time of its original designation, consideration was given to extending the area to include Sutton Walk to the west of The Mount, but although this is a compact unit of 3 similar rows of quasi-Georgian terraced houses somewhat echoing the form of The Mount itself, it was, along with other modern housing to the west considered to be of a different character and of insufficient quality for inclusion in the conservation area. Sutton Walk was granted planning permission in 1968 and built shortly thereafter. There is also a linear open strip on the west side of The Mount and Lower Mount containing trees and frontage railings which has the effect of physically separating Sutton Walk from The Mount itself. Confusingly however the Sutton Walk street name sign is of the green conservation area type prevalent in the town's conservation areas.

The Progress Theatre was however included in the conservation area essentially because of its particularly close and unique spatial relationship to 53, 53A, Linden Mews and 55 Christchurch Road and its linking function to the remainder of the conservation area. Its presence within the conservation area would help to guide future improvement and/or development proposals on the site (and at that time would have also given it eligibility for local authority grant aid). Notwithstanding this, if the Progress Theatre had been excluded from the conservation area, its location immediately adjoining the conservation area, and any proposals for the site, would still need to be judged in terms of their impact on the setting of the conservation area.

In short, The Mount Conservation Area stands out as an attractive exception to the varied and often redeveloped character of the wider area which surrounds it.

## **4.0 Historic development**

### **4.1 History**

Reading is named after the Readingas, Saxon followers of Reada, 'the Red', who settled in the spit of land in the fork of the Thames and Kennet in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Reading belonged to the king and included a small borough and two manors. Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121. The abbey dominated the town and became one of the richest religious houses in England making Reading a wealthy place, and a centre of religion and pilgrimage.

Wool and leather were Reading's principal trades in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, making good use of the town's road and river links. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Reading was

an important market and coaching town; new industries developed, notably brewing, iron-founding and brick and tile making. Early 19th century maps show the town had hardly extended beyond its medieval core but a fast town expansion was stimulated by the development of new transport links. The Kennet and Avon Canal was opened in 1810 bringing London and Bristol, two major sea ports, into direct communication by water. Of much greater significance, however, was the construction of the Great Western Railway which reached the town in 1840. The coming of the railway resulted in a rapid growth of major industries, notably Huntley & Palmers and Suttons Seeds, which provided work for a rapidly increasing population.

Between 1850 and 1900 the population of the Borough more than trebled from 21,456 to 72,217 and the housing stock increased accordingly.

The history of The Mount Conservation Area is inextricably tied up with the growth of Huntley and Palmers in its heyday. The majority of the properties in the conservation area were built by and for Huntley and Palmers themselves as has already been explained.

Progress Theatre apart, The Mount Area dates almost wholly from the 1870s, and shows few real changes since that period.

#### **4.2 The effect of historic development on plan form**

The core of the designated Conservation Area clearly demonstrates a planned form being built specifically for a group of Huntley and Palmer's workers, and formed part of the continuing development spread of substantial suburban villas in this south east direction out of Reading. Unfortunately, in the immediate vicinity of, and except for, the conservation area itself, few of the original Victorian buildings remain, having been redeveloped.

### **5.0 Spatial analysis**

#### **5.1 Key views and vistas**

Despite the slight rise from north to south, the conservation area is generally approached "on the flat" from the levels of Allcroft Road to the north and Christchurch Road to the south. The Hillside site is prominent at the Allcroft Road side of the conservation area not only because of its intrinsic size but also prominent tree cover and original surrounding boundary walls and railings. Whilst these trees, walls and railings are visible from along the length of Allcroft Road itself, they (and Hillside itself) are not highly visible from any great distance.

Similarly, the core buildings in The Mount and on its Christchurch Road frontage are more prominent close up than from a distance although, again, these walls and

railings, and some trees on the frontage, are visible from along the length of Christchurch Road itself.

Within the area there is an interesting stopped off view looking up the Lower Mount from the north towards number 22 The Mount. All the corner properties within The Mount represent key views within the conservation area as these tend to be the larger end-terrace, semi-detached and detached properties.

Within the area, open space, trees and railings fronting Sutton Walk to the west of The Mount and Lower Mount are an important visual element and aspect for the properties immediately opposite them. These form part of a conservation area enhancement scheme implemented shortly after designation of the conservation area in 1987.

A less attractive internal view is that along the road in front of numbers 24-36 The Mount towards Progress Theatre and from numbers 38 and 40 opposite.



24-36 The Mount looking towards Progress Theatre

The best view out of the area is along Christchurch Road to the west towards the visually prominent spire of Christchurch itself. Elsewhere “views out” from the front and rear of properties in the conservation area, where they are not protected by tree cover, are to 1930s and later dwellings outside the conservation area.

## 5.2 The character of spaces within the area

The conservation generally speaking, does not benefit from any obvious open spaces, not least since the grounds of Hillside were developed to add to the university accommodation. There is however an important linear open strip on the west side of The Mount and Lower Mount containing trees and frontage railings which contributes

to softening the general built up feel within the core of the conservation area as well as defining the edge of this part of the conservation area.

Except for the extensions in the grounds of Hillside, the defined area is not one which has been subject to pressures for significant (re)development in recent years. Although areas immediately outside the defined conservation area have experienced more development pressures, only the aforementioned site within the conservation area - Hillside - has experienced development in its grounds. However, to quote the listing entry "the house retains its entrance drive, gatepiers, gates and railings and some of its garden giving it its original sense of scale, space and context".

Except for the Christchurch Road frontage and the Progress Theatre site, the area exhibits a certain formality to the layout of the dwellings within it, and in general terms the area has in its core a fairly compact and formal "urban" rather than "suburban" feel to it (also serving to distinguish it from surrounding areas). Some alterations and extensions to original dwellings have taken place but these generally reflect the character and appearance of the original buildings by using compatible materials and retaining important boundary wall and railing details. Certainly from the front, the properties appear little changed, but the rear elevations indicate examples of inappropriate additions, including dormers.

The properties in the conservation area have varying depths, but none have particularly large rear garden spaces. As previously stated there has been little pressure for redevelopment here.

Nevertheless there is significant tree cover throughout the area and outside it, which gives the area some verdant character. There are important trees around the Hillside site, on the west side of The Mount and Lower Mount, on the Christchurch Road frontage and outside the area. These are shown on the Appraisal Map at Appendix 1.

Throughout the area, front boundaries are defined by brick walls and railings which are a key element of the character of the conservation area as a whole as well as providing a good setting for individual properties.

## **6.0 Definition of the special interest of the conservation area**

### **6.1 Definition of character areas**

The Conservation Area is a tightly drawn area centred on the Grade II listed properties in The Mount itself and includes adjacent properties of similar age on the Christchurch road frontage to the south and the listed Hillside to the north fronting Allcroft Road and Lower Mount.

The area is therefore clearly defined as dating from the late Victorian period, specifically circa 1870s. The only anomaly to this historical period is the Progress Theatre.

Apart from the development in the grounds of Hillside and of course the Progress Theatre, the area has generally resisted pressure for (re)development, and in this respect must be considered to be quite unique. The character of the area therefore remains strong. The area can be divided into the following three character areas:

#### Area 1: The Mount and its Christchurch Road frontage

The Mount itself comprises a close knit street block of listed houses with local historic interest being originally built for Huntley & Palmer's employees. These houses comprise a unique and distinctive group of buildings of both architectural and local historic value and form the core of the conservation area. They are listed Grade II. These buildings date from c.1876 and were built for Huntley and Palmer's clerks, foremen and managers. They comprise a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses with design and decorative features in common. All the properties were constructed of gault bricks with paler detailing and banding, and with slate roofs. They retain much of their original character and appearance, including frontage walls and railings.

#### Area 2: Hillside, Lower Mount/Allcroft Road

Hillside, to the north of The Mount is a good example of a slightly later large Victorian detached house, which also retains its original walls and railings. It is dated 1880 by Morris and Smallwood for WI Palmer of Huntley and Palmers was extended and dated 1898 by the same architects. It is built of grey brick with extensive red brick and terra cotta dressings, slate roofs and red tile cresting. The listing describes it as "one of the most opulent buildings of this period in Reading, which has a rich diversity of late C19 housing. Morris and Smallwood were prolific and accomplished local architects, well tuned to the tastes and trends in public and private building, suited to a wealthy client wishing to invest in a building of the highest quality". The building is now owned by Reading University and subdivided into flats. Although the grounds have been built over in part, the house retains its entrance drive, gates and railings and some of its garden, giving it its original sense of scale space and context.

The gatepiers, walls, gates and railings form two sides of the boundary to Hillside to Allcroft Road and Lower Mount. These date from 1880-1900 and are valuable in putting the house in context.



Main entrance to Hillside from Allcroft Road

The quality of the Hillside site is also enhanced by its extensive boundary tree cover.

### Area 3: 53, 53A, Linden Mews, 55 Christchurch Road and the Progress Theatre

Nearby properties fronting Christchurch Road are of a similar age, if different style, being of rendered finish, but again retaining original walls and/or railings. 53, 53A, Linden Mews and 55 Christchurch Road, and 2 and 4 The Mount, are all shown on the 1877 map of Reading and are therefore of the same date or earlier than the properties in Areas 1 and 2. They are included in the Conservation Area for their group value and character. Number 53 is a single storey classic lodge building which adjoined the main entrance to "Sutherlands", which site was redeveloped in the 1970s as Lancaster Close (accessed from Allcroft Road). Part of the original pierced and decorative wall also remains. 53A and Linden Mews were formed from "Sutherlands" outbuildings, and although altered and extended, these retain their original spatial pattern. 55 is a prominent two storey white rendered building of classic proportions with some Georgian style windows in the main elevation. Again, original railings enclose the frontage.

Progress Theatre, which dates from the 1930s was included in the originally designated conservation not for its own intrinsic value, but "to reasonably round off the area".

### The Area generally.

*Features that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:*



- Retention of original buildings and their settings with few detrimental changes by way of new development and/or addition of non-traditional materials;
- Retention of original brick walls and railings throughout the area;
- Good tree cover within the grounds of individual properties and throughout the area;

*Features that have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the conservation area:*

- Heavily trafficked route to the south of the conservation area;
- Loss of original brick wall and railings at 6 The Mount;
- White painted brickwork at number 25 The Mount;
- Out of character building at Progress Theatre;
- Some walls in need of repair on the Christchurch Road frontage;
- Whilst not inherently unattractive in itself, some overgrowth of walls and railings with hedges;
- Lack of traditional street furniture, including street lighting;
- Poor street and pavement surfaces with little use of traditional materials;
- Over-reliance on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses within;
- The absence of parking restrictions in The Mount itself leads to daytime parking by commuters and users of the Christchurch Road shopping parade to the east.

Surrounded by much more modern buildings, the conservation area itself and the buildings within it have generally retained their original character. Although there have been relatively few pressures to redevelop sites in the past, these have generally respected the prevailing character and appearance of the conservation area. However there is clearly scope to redress some quite modest failings apparent in the foregoing list.

## **6.2 Activities and uses**

The area has historically been and currently is a residential area of individual family houses to the north of Christchurch Road. Hillside however does comprise a Reading University hall of residence, with the Progress Theatre being the only non-residential use.

It is only on the outside of the area, particularly on the south side of Christchurch Road that non-residential uses have prevailed, but recent (re) developments have introduced more residential uses here. At the time of its original designation there was a car sales/repair garage immediately opposite the conservation area, which was a source of complaint for using The Mount for overflow and visitors car parking. However, its redevelopment for housing has had the effect of removing that problem, to the benefit of the conservation area.

Properties in the area appear to very much in demand and therefore generally fully occupied and in a good state of repair.

Despite its position just north of the busy Christchurch Road the area possesses a quiet (residential) atmosphere, which is helped by the cul de sac arrangement of both the Mount and Lower Mount which are separated by bollards introduced as part of a conservation area enhancement scheme implemented shortly after the conservation area was designated. This prevents rat runs through the area between Allcroft Road and Christchurch Road.

However with no parking restrictions in The Mount itself this appears to lead to daytime parking by commuters and users of the Christchurch Road shopping parade to the east.

### **6.3 Architectural and historic character: building methods and materials**

The conservation area is essentially a residential area, clearly highly prized because of its location close to local amenities, Reading University and the Royal Berkshire Hospital. It contains properties from the late Victorian period.

The buildings in The Mount itself are of gault brick with paler facings. "Hillside" is built of grey brick with red facings. The remaining Victorian properties fronting Christchurch Road are rendered, but all of them possess intricacies of detailing prevalent in the "richer" houses of the period and reflecting Reading's heritage of Victorian patterned brickwork.

Altogether, these (different) brick built buildings therefore possess the distinguishing features of Reading's architecture and there are examples of good quality brickwork throughout the conservation area. Brick was a popular building material in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the ready availability of different coloured bricks provided the opportunity for the lively polychromatic brickwork found throughout this part of Victorian/Edwardian Reading. The town had several brickworks, the most notable being S & E Collier Ltd at Water Road and Elgar Road and two brick works in the Tilehurst area.

Slate roofs prevail in the area.

### **6.4 Buildings of Townscape Merit**

Buildings identified as having "townscape merit" will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered 19<sup>th</sup> century and later buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of a conservation area.

Buildings of Townscape Merit help create a conservation area's distinctive and interesting historic townscape. As recommended in *Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment*, the general presumption should be in favour of retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.

Clearly, all the buildings within the Conservation area are important to its "townscape", but the majority of them are already listed in their own right. It is therefore generally unlisted corner buildings which strictly tend to fall into this category as they have a more commanding presence (even though they may not be not visible from any great distance). The following non-listed buildings are considered to have townscape value or "buildings of townscape merit":

- 53, 53A and 55 Christchurch Road;
- 2 and 4 The Mount.



55 Christchurch Road

#### **6.5 Public realm. Floorscape, street lighting and street furniture.**

Road and footway surfaces are predominantly modern i.e. tarmac and concrete kerbs. Whilst generally in average condition (there is evidence of repairs by "utilities" throughout the area), these surfaces are not attractive and not "traditional" in conservation area terms.

Street lighting columns, signage and street furniture are modern, and this is another area with considerable potential for improvement. There are no examples of traditional lighting in the Area.

Properties in the Conservation Area rely on individual telegraph poles throughout the area with attendant wires radiating out to the houses.

Brick walls and railings are to be found throughout the area and are clearly an essential part of the public realm and character of the Conservation Area.

### 6.6 Local details and features

The pre-eminent local detail throughout this Conservation Area, and “unifying” it, is the presence of rich, often unique, examples of traditional polychromatic brickwork from the late Victorian period and of brick walls and railings on property boundaries.

### 6.7 Historic associations

Much of the history of The Mount Conservation relates to its connection with the Huntley and Palmer biscuit factory, with housing in The Mount itself provided for senior employees of the factory and “Hillside” providing a Palmer family house. “Hillside” is also attributable to the prolific and important local architects, Morris and Smallwood.

### 6.8 Green spaces, trees and other natural elements

The conservation area generally comprises mature properties, and although these tend to have small gardens (The Mount and Christchurch Road) and/or little garden space around them, there is important tree cover on the Christchurch Road and “Hillside” frontages, which gives a general verdant feel to the area of buildings and trees in harmony. Street trees exist to the west side of The Mount/Lower Mount in front of Sutton Walk. Tree cover immediately outside the area (some protected by Tree Preservation Orders) also contributes to the setting of the conservation.



Looking east towards The Mount on north side of Christchurch Road

Trees therefore make a significant contribution to the conservation area's special character and sense of identity. Significant tree groups are shown on the Appraisal Map at Appendix 1.

Because of their importance to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area, where they are not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), it is necessary to give the local planning authority 6 weeks notice of any intention to cut down, top or lop any tree in a Conservation Area, which also enables a local planning authority to consider whether the trees should be formally protected by the making of a TPO. There are currently TPOs covering trees at 55 Christchurch Road, the Progress Theatre and 79-81 The Mount (part of the Sutton walk development).

#### **6.9 General condition of the area: The extent of loss, intrusions or damage i.e. negative features.**

The general state of repair of the properties in the Conservation Area is good with properties not remaining vacant for any length of time.

However, in common with many of Reading's conservation areas, the Area is lacking in the quality, if not the state of repair of the highway environment (roadways, footways and street furniture).

All of these areas would benefit from continued monitoring, and the seizing of opportunities for improvement as they arise.

#### **6.10 Problems, pressures and issues**

##### *Design of new development*

Within the conservation area itself there are few recent developments, but these have generally respected the character, scale of buildings and materials used in the conservation area, thus maintaining its character and appearance. A small number of elements within the conservation area detract from its character. Generally developments immediately outside the conservation area heed their context adjoining or near the conservation area and do not have a notably negative effect on its character and appearance. Previous less compatible uses like the car sales/repair garage on the south side of Christchurch Road have been replaced by more appropriate residential redevelopments. The design of new development within and adjoining/near the conservation area should however remain an issue.

##### *Loss of original architectural details*

In general terms the loss of original features, particularly front elevation and boundary features is very limited. There are few examples of non-traditional windows

in the buildings in the conservation area. The worst examples of inappropriate changes tending to be at the rear of properties. There is a clear issue here in terms of respecting the setting of individual buildings as well as enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area, in accordance with advice contained in PPG15 and the saved policies contained in the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Given that the majority of the buildings in the conservation area are listed in their own right, it is not considered necessary for the local planning authority to consider using its powers to withdraw permitted development rights which affect the external appearance of dwelling houses in the conservation area, namely alterations to doors, windows, roofs and frontages (including boundary walls). Listed building protection requires that any changes affecting these elements would normally require formal applications for listed building consent.

### *Traffic noise and pollution*

The character and environmental quality of the conservation area is spoilt most by noise and pollution of traffic using the main A327 Christchurch Road running along the southern boundary of the area, particularly during the rush hours.

### *Street clutter*

This is not generally an issue with regard to the overall character and appearance of the conservation area, even at its junctions with Christchurch Road (unlike many other junctions in and adjoining other conservation areas in Reading).

Attention has also been drawn to the detrimental impact of individual telegraph poles and wires radiating out from them.

## **7.0 Areas for further work**

### **7.1 Consideration of conservation area boundary changes (to be the subject of a public consultation exercise)**

Given that there are no real changes in circumstances since the Conservation Area was originally designated no changes are recommended to alter or extend the boundaries of the conservation area (see the penultimate paragraphs of Section 3.1).

### **7.2 Opportunities for enhancement**

Floorscape and street furniture improvements should be considered in this area, including replacing telegraph poles.

### 7.3 Monitoring and review

This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

- A survey of the area to identify changes in its character and appearance;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements;
- A building condition survey;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

## Appendix 1 - Townscape Appraisal Map





**TITLE** The Mount Conservation Area

- 1 The Mount and its Christchurch Road frontage
- 2 Hillside, Lower Mount / Allcroft Road
- 3 53, 53a, Linden Mews, 55 Christchurch Road, Progress Theatre

**SCALE** 1:1250

© Crown Copyright. All Rights Reserved. Reading Borough Council. Account No 100019672 2008



**Reading**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL  
PLANNING SUPPORT TEAM

## The Mount Conservation Area Townscape Appraisal Map



Conservation Area Boundary



Listed Building



Buildings of townscape value



Tree Preservation Orders



Other tree groups



Character Areas



Enhancement Area

## Appendix 2 - Relevant Local Plan Policies

The following policies from the Reading Borough Local Plan (1991-2006) are relevant to the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area:

### **POLICY CUD 6: DEMOLITION OF UNLISTED BUILDINGS IN CONSERVATION AREAS**

*CONSENT TO DEMOLISH IN A CONSERVATION AREA WILL NORMALLY ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT IT IS WHOLLY BEYOND REPAIR, INCAPABLE OF REASONABLY BENEFICIAL USE, OF INAPPROPRIATE STRUCTURE OR DESIGN, OR WHERE IT'S REMOVAL OR REPLACEMENT WOULD BENEFIT THE APPEARANCE OR CHARACTER OF THE AREA. DEMOLITION WILL BE MORE FAVOURABLY ASSESSED WHERE THERE ARE APPROVED DETAILED PLANS FOR REDEVELOPMENT AND A CONTRACT FOR CARRYING OUT THE WORKS HAS BEEN ENTERED INTO.*

### **POLICY CUD 7: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS**

*AS APPROPRIATE NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS SHOULD MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE AREA BY RESPECTING OR ENHANCING ITS ARCHITECTURAL AND VISUAL QUALITIES AND ACHIEVING A HIGH STANDARD OF DESIGN. DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS WILL NORMALLY BE PERMITTED ONLY WHERE THE PARTICULAR HISTORIC OR ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF THE AREA WILL BE PRESERVED AND THERE IS NO LIKELIHOOD OF HARM BEING CAUSED TO THE AREAS CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE. THE BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL AS APPROPRIATE SEEK TO PRESERVE THE EXISTING BALANCE OF USES IN CONSERVATION AREAS.*

Because of the high percentage of listed buildings in the Conservation Area. Policies CUD 1 ((Works Affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 2 (Change of Use of Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings) and CUD 4 (Setting of Listed Buildings) also apply.